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MODERN LINGUISTICS AND THE TEACHING OF LATIN.

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TRADITIONALISTS FREQUENTLY MAINTAIN THAT AUDIOLINGUAL TECHNIQUES, IN THEIR DEEMPHASIS OF GRAMMATICAL THEORY, TEND TO BE SUPERFICIAL AND UNSCHOLARLY. ADVOCATES OF THE NEWER METHODOLOGIES COUNTER BY INSISTING UPON THE NECESSITY OF WELL-CONSTRUCTED DRILL MATERIAL IN ABUNDANCE AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL. THE DIFFERENCE IN THE APPROACHES DERIVES FROM TWO COMPETING THEORIES OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION. THE TRADITIONALISTS FOCUS UPON THE ROLE OF THE INTELLECT IN THIS TASK. AFTER THE GRAMMATICAL RULES AND PARADIGMS HAVE BEEN EXPLAINED CLEARLY IN CLASS, THE STUDENT MUST STRIVE TO UNDERSTAND THEM SO THAT HE CAN PROCEED TO THE READING OF GRADED TEXTS. AUDIOLINGUAL TEACHERS, ON THE OTHER HAND, BELIEVE THAT LANGUAGE LEARNING IS BASICALLY A MATTER OF HABIT FORMING. NEW SKILLS ARE TO BE MASTERED AND THIS SIMPLY REQUIRES PRACTICE. THE KEY TO A RECONCILIATION OF THE TWO METHODOLOGIES IS A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF ALL THAT IS INVOLVED IN THE TERM GRAMMAR. LINGUISTIC DESCRIPTIONS WRITTEN BY THE LINGUISTS ARE GRAMMARS, BUT SO IS THE TOTAL KNOWLEDGE THAT THE NATIVE SPEAKER POSSESSES OF HIS LANGUAGE, A KNOWLEDGE THAT ENABLES HIM TO RECOGNIZE AND PRODUCE ON HIS OWN WELL-FORMED SENTENCES. THE AUDIOLINGUAL METHODOLOGY THEREFORE DOES TEACH GRAMMAR SINCE THE STUDENT WHO MASTERS A PARTICULAR LINGUISTIC PATTERN HAS IN EFFECT CONSTRUCTED FOR HIMSELF THE APPOSITE RULE. A BRIEF PRESENTATION OF SUCH RULES BY THE TEACHER WILL SERVE THE PURPOSE OF GIVING THE STUDENT A THEORETICAL ACCOUNT OF WHAT HE IS TRYING TO LEARN PRACTICALLY. THE RATIONALE OF THIS ARTICLE IS DISCUSSED WITHIN A CONTEXT OF LATIN INSTRUCTION. THE ARTICLE IS AN ISSUE OF THE "CATHOLIC CLASSICAL ASSOCIATION OF GREATER NEW YORK NEWSLETTER," VOLUME 26, NEWSLETTER 5, NOVEMBER 18, 1965. (AUTHOR)

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# MODERN LINGUISTICS AND THE TEACHING OF LATIN

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To their conservatively oriented colleagues in the classical field, audio-lingual advocates sometimes appear as misguided enthusiasts eager to reap an abundant harvest without first plowing the land and planting seed. The traditionalist feels intuitively that any teacher is deluded who believes that students can acquire mastery over a new language without coming to grips with its grammar. He is wont to object in discussions of new methodology that there is a vast difference between the more or less mature high school or college student and the child reared in a Latin-speaking environment some two thousand years ago. Children necessarily approach their future language with a linguistic tabula rasa; furthermore they must learn it to communicate with the world in which they find themselves. They have all the time they need to devote to this task; in fact one could almost say that learning his language is the chief occupation of the pre-school child. These conditions, needless to say, are not met in the modern student. Clearly the job must be done in far less time, and the motivation involved can hardly equal that of the child who needed Latin in order to survive. But just as important, say the traditionalists, the student of today already controls his own language and hopefully understands its grammar. Therefore why not use his native language when attempting to teach a second language? When the student learns the new grammatical structures and is given sufficient vocabulary, he will be able to read with understanding texts written in the new language. The proof that he really does understand what he reads will lie in his ability to translate from the new language back into the native language. Such is the theory which lies behind the traditional methodology of grammatical analysis and translation. How is it possible to find fault with this approach to language learning especially for the classical languages? The student is treated as a mature individual capable of insight into the grammatical forms and rules of the new language. As soon as possible he is introduced to significant literature. Hopefully this serves not merely as a corpus vile for grammatical dissection, but more importantly introduces the student to the cultural values of antiquity. There is no doubt that this methodology can produce good results; most, if not all, classical scholars in the world today received their training along these lines. Why then a clamor for new methods? Is it a result simply of a loss of nerve due to a decline in the number of students enrolling in the classics?

It seems to me that more is involved. Two seemingly irreconcilable theories of language learning meet head on in this debate. In reaction to the traditionalist position described above, the aural-oral theoreticians emphasize the skill aspect of language learning.

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Almost a cliche among them nowadays would be the remark that language learning is habit forming, not puzzle solving. In their methodologies therefore little if any time is devoted to theoretical explanations of the grammar and especially to the terminological apparatus that has always accompanied such presentations; instead the classroom time is given over to massive drills, the so-called pattern-practice drills, aimed at giving the student control over the new pattern. The very fact mentioned above that the mature student does know his own language so well is recognized now as the greatest obstacle to his mastering a new one since he must necessarily construct for himself a completely different way of talking about the world, and at each step in the process there will be interference from the native patterns to which he has grown so accustomed that all others seem slightly irrational, if not downright perverse.

The pattern drill becomes therefore indispensable to the new methodology. All his speaking life the student has distinguished, say, subjects from objects (not that he is aware of the terms) by the grammatical device of word position. In reading Latin however this signal must be disregarded and attention directed to the case markers. A technical presentation of this structural difference and five or ten sentences to be translated from Latin into English and vice versa cannot suffice to break through the linguistic habits of a lifetime. A good methodology requires a great deal of well-constructed drill material even for just this one aspect of Latin grammar. Within the context of such a drill, as is well known, the students encounter a list of sentences whose structural descriptions they already control; they are asked to make some adjustment in, to perform some operation upon these sentences and thus generate new and equally correct sentences. Hopefully the class not only learns the new construction but perhaps just as importantly appreciates the precise relationship between the stimulus sentence and the response. Pattern practices accordingly play such an important role in language learning that a reviewer could safely proceed on the assumption that no elementary text lacking this kind of drill should be recommended to the profession.

The two basic methodologies, traditional (grammar-translation) and modern (aural-oral), in my opinion, spring from a different evaluation of the role of the intellect or understanding in language learning. Traditionalists lay great stress upon theoretical explanations of grammatical rules and of course upon the whole technical terminology that goes with them. In class the student must not only comprehend the meaning of a sentence; he must know why and how it means what it does and be able to explain this to the teacher in the accepted jargon. A student presumably will lose points for being unable to identify gladio as an ablative of means in a sentence: militem gladio necavit, even though he might fully grasp the meaning of the sentence. In effect therefore the traditional approach to language learning has not been satisfied with the acquisition of the skills needed to control the new language, but has felt it necessary to make linguists (albeit amateur) out of the pupils since after all the essential task of the linguist is to explain scientifically the grammatical structure of the language he is studying. At this point we are not condemning this attempt (what is wrong with a little linguistics ?), but it is easy to see how it could be disastrous when distorted by uninspired teachers.

In reaction to this all too often exclusive concern with grammatical theorizing in elementary language classes, the modern approach seems to deemphasize the intellectual aspects of language learning and concentrate for the most part upon acquiring the required skills. Obviously control of a language and the ability to analyze the language scientifically are two different things. Every native speaker possesses the first; the second is properly the skill of the linguist. The advocate of audio-lingual methods is therefore fully prepared to settle for control as the most desirable and most important goal of language teaching. Hopefully, his methods make possible the attainment of that goal. This approach can hardly be attacked--although it has been--on the grounds that it is somehow not intellectual enough, not sufficiently humanistic to engage the mature student. Language skills, that is to say speaking, comprehension, reading, writing, are certainly human activities demanding intellectual effort of no small amount. Aural-oral methods after all do not succeed with chimpanzees nor for that matter with people who for one reason or another do not make the basic commitment to learning. Mastering a grammatical pattern in such a way as to be able to produce well-formed phrases or sentences not previously heard requires at some point that flash of insight into the nature of reality, in this case linguistic reality, that characterizes all human intellectual efforts. It is not essentially different from the physicist's realization that his hypothesis will really explain the phenomenon. So while the new methodology does deemphasize one highly intellectual and praiseworthy scholarly endeavor, the scientific linguistic study of the language in question, in order to obtain more time for the drills needed to give the student mastery of the new patterns, it is unfair to stigmatize this as anti-intellectual.

Occasionally one hears eloquent pleas emanating from the traditional camp for the necessity of immersing Latin students almost immediately in real literature. In this respect presumably we, teachers of the classics, have an advantage over our modern language counterparts who are constrained by all sorts of pressures to aim at aural-oral proficiency. Attempts, however, to implement these exhortations are usually unrealistic and end with the poor student plowing his weary way through material much too difficult for his level of competence and probably resolving to drop Latin at the first opportunity. There is no sense in attempting Caesar or Cicero before one has acquired a certain degree of fluency in reading Latin suited for neophytes; as in life, so in language skills we must crawl before we are able to walk.

The tradition-minded classics teacher relies upon the art of translation both as a practical procedure for determining the comprehension of his students and as an invaluable literary exercise. He finds it very difficult to accept the strictures of the new-breed methodological theoreticians against translation, particularly since he believes nothing can accomplish his goals so efficiently as translation. What then is the rationale of the criticisms thar are presently being directed against the use of translation at the elementary level? First of all, nobody denies the value of translation in itself. A skilled literary translator--not a hack--is a creative artist in every sense of the word. The merits of his model play a secondary

role in the critical evaluation of the translation, which is either a success or failure, admittedly with many degrees, in its own right. A genuine artist can transform a second rate poem into a masterpiece by his translation and yet even the Iliad can become lifeless at the hands of an uninspired translator. As he works, the creative energies of the translator are channeled in the direction of the target language; that is to say, his intellectual search is for appropriate words and sentences in the language into which he is translating. The original remains untouched. This insistence upon the creative forces involved in translation may strike many Latin teachers as quixotic in the extreme as they reflect upon the tens of thousands of translations they have patiently or impatiently, as the case may be, listened to and which they justifiably feel deserve only a merciful oblivion. This very fact--the undeniable mediocrity or worse of almost all classroom translation--indicates that translation belongs only in a very advanced and specialized course; it is simply out of place at the elementary and intermediate level, precisely because it is such a difficult and sophisticated activity. The neophyte ought to concentrate all his attention on the grammatical structures and vocabulary of Latin; instead, we compel him to scatter his energies, to divide his time between thinking in Latin and English, whenever we call for an English rendition. Quite naturally he begins to hunt in the Latin sentence for subject, verb, and object instead of taking the sentence as it comes and understanding it in Latin with no reference to English. Surely there are other ways to check for comprehension; English teachers, for instance, learn quite readily whether their pupils understand, say, Shakespeare without benefit of translation. By the same token, well-formulated and clever questions in Latin not only enable the teacher to check the comprehension of the students but in addition impart an atmosphere of liveliness to the class. The best and quickest way to convince others that Latin is not"dead"(which is usually interpreted "boring") is to use the language in the classroom, and there is no easier or more natural way of doing this than through the explication du texte.

So far we have seen the very real differences between the traditional and modern methodologies and the theoretical assumptions underlying both. My own allegiance is, I suppose, evident in view of the somewhat prejudiced nature of the reporting. However, since intradisciplinary squabbles of this kind are undesirable at any time and especially now when so many even educated people consider classical studies to be irrelevant in the modern world, we might inquire into the possibility of reaching an ecumenical meeting of minds between representatives of both approaches to learning Latin. This rapprochement ought to begin with a clarification of the term 'grammar,' for it is with this word that fundamental and futile disagreement occurs. One side stands accused of neglecting grammar, the other of overstressing it; but from the viewpoint of the linguist neither accusation makes sense. 'Grammar'is used in two fundamental senses in modern linguistics. It refers first of all to the inner or mental knowledge that the native speaker possesses of his language. Grammars therefore exist primarily as abstract structures in the mind and brain of human beings, who consequently have the ability to generate and comprehend

well-formed sentences. Without this assumption of an internal system there is no sufficient explanation for the regularities that we observe in actual sentences. No speaker of Latin, for instance, ever produced a sentence like hominem ab amici interficitur for the simple reason that it is ungrammatical, that is, not generable by the actual rules of the language. He is forced by the rules to say: homo ab amico interficitur. The native speaker becomes in effect a walking grammar; as a child he had to learn a dynamic set of rules which now enable him to compose an infinite number of correct (grammatical) sentences. These rules are controlled so well that the actual speaking becomes semi-automatic. Latin speakers obviously did not reflect on how to put amare into the future passive, third person singular; the word amabitur was on their lips when they needed it in a sentence.

The second sense of 'grammar' is quite traditional. Linguistic studies of specific languages are called grammars. In this usage, a grammar is a theory of the language in question, i.e., it purports to be a complete explanation of the linguistic behavior and competence of a certain social group. It corresponds in some way with the internal grammar which is the possession of the native speaker. For instance, we require of the linguist's rules that they have the same generative power as the rules in the mind of the native speaker, that is, they must be able to account for the infinite set of sentences which can occur in the language. Needless to say, the linguist does not directly observe the neurological activity of the speaker any more than the physicist can see the protons, electrons, etc. which play such an important role in his theories. In a grammar the elements, classes, and combinatory rules function as a total theory explaining the linguistic behavior of groups of human beings.

Hence statements occasionally emanating from the aural-oral camp denigrating the importance of grammar at the elementary and intermediate level are misleading; it is precisely this grammatical training which gives us control over the language. Under the direction of his teacher, the first-year student works at building up the semi-automatic habits of the proficient user of the language; in other words, he is engaged with the internalization of the totality of Latin grammar--a speeded-up repetition of the task he successfully accomplished with his native language during childhood. Furthermore, no one should object to a systematic presentation from time to time of the Latin grammatical structures, for example, the various declensions, provided that the instructor realizes that he is teaching grammar in the second sense defined above. Unfortunately, however, much that passes for grammatical training is pointless. The distinctions among certain ablatives, for instance, depend solely on the meanings of the particular words selected. If we control the construction and know the meanings of these words, we understand the sentence. In sentences like illo tempore venit and illa hasta necatus est it is traditional to speak of an ablative of time and an ablative of means. Grammatically these distinctions are irrelevant since both sentences would be provided with the same syntactic description. Time spent in this kind of semantic hair-splitting might more profitably be used in, say, transforming nominatives into ablatives within the context of a drill teaching the relationships between active and passive constructions.

In the interest of concord therefore advocates of aural-oral methodologies might be persuaded to give up their aversion to the term 'grammar.' Pattern practices, as we have seen, teach grammar in the sense of internal control of linguistic structures. An up-to-date and formal presentation of these structures will help the student to understand speculatively the system he is working to dominate.

The traditionalist on the other hand must begin to appreciate the necessity of well-constructed drill material in sufficient quantity to enable the student to master as efficiently as possible the grammatical patterns of the Latin language. He ought also, I believe, to examine closely his use of translation as a standard methodological procedure both at the elementary and intermediate level. Admittedly the traditionalist is being asked to make more changes in his methods. No apologies need be offered for this; these are simply the views of one linguist.

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